



The Elements of Meaningful Participation
April 7-8, 2021



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Welcome to Elements of Meaningful Participation



- ☐ Two half-days
- ☐ One 15 minute break each day
- ☐ Dialogue and small groups

2

Using Zoom



- ☐ App works best
- ☐ Please keep your camera on during plenary and small group discussions
- ☐ Keep mics muted when not talking
- ☐ Does anyone need help with zoom?

3

Introductions



- ☐ Basic facts
- ☐ Something unique
- ☐ Why are you here?

4

Challenge Board



- ☐ What are the biggest challenges you face working with the public?

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Six Elements of Meaningful Participation

1. Commit to Real Participation
2. Establish Clear Expectations
3. Design Your Process to Focus on the Right Things at the Right Time
4. Engage the Whole Community
5. Build Trust by Meeting People Where They Are
6. Communicate, Relate, and Connect






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The Elements of Meaningful Participation




1. Commit to Real Participation

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First, Acknowledge That The Public Can Actually Help

- The challenge is to help them help you
- And all staff need to be involved

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"Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed."



— Abraham Lincoln




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What is Public Participation?

...any process that seeks to understand and use input from the full range of stakeholder perspectives in a planned effort to improve decision-making.



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Public Participation is Different

Public Participation = Input You Intend to Use


Public Engagement = Understanding & Relationships

Public Relations = Buy-In

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Buy-In is Not Participation





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NEVER...

- ❑ Ask for input we don't plan to consider
- ❑ Act like the public has the opportunity for influence when they don't



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Why Participation Fails

Historical regulatory approaches have led to bad participation...

- ① We Start Too Late
- ② We Create Unrealistic Expectations
- ③ We Do Not Engage the Whole Community
- ④ We Ask the Wrong Questions
- ⑤ Not Everyone is on Board



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Why Participation Fails

- ⑥ We Don't Give it Our Full Attention
- ⑦ Stakeholders are Not All Well Informed
- ⑧ Our Approach is Not Equitable
- ⑨ The Community is Not on the Decision Track
- ⑩ We Don't Provide Good Feedback



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Use Public Input To Make Better Decisions

- ❑ The public has a collective wisdom that leads to better choices
- ❑ The public has to live with the decisions
- ❑ Unhappy stakeholders can overturn sound decisions
- ❑ Small issues can become big problems if ignored



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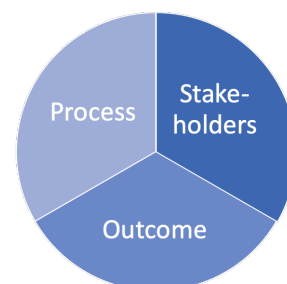
Being Technically "Right" Is Not Enough

- ❑ Stakeholders need to **understand** the decision
- ❑ Stakeholders need to **trust** the decision
- ❑ Stakeholders need to feel some **ownership** of the decision



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Good Decisions Require Good Participation



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We Must Get Past "NO"

- ❑ Protest can't be the only access to power
- ❑ We're not the complaint department, we are making shared decisions
- ❑ This is essentially about good governance



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Good Decisions = Good Governance

- ❑ Resolve issues and conflict
- ❑ Create shared ownership of solutions
- ❑ Create sustainable solutions



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Model of Sustainability



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Commit At Every Level

- ❑ Believe in the value of participation
- ❑ Common understanding of goals
- ❑ Commitment of all management and staff
- ❑ Clear roles and responsibilities
- ❑ Clarity about time and resources needed
- ❑ Agreement/plan to prevent "end runs"



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Build Core Capacity

- ❑ Planning Participation
- ❑ Facilitation
- ❑ Communication
- ❑ Conflict management
- ❑ Relationship management



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Engage In A Participatory Attitude

- ❑ Your **attitude** toward the public is your strongest asset
- ❑ You need to **model the behaviors** you are seeking from the community
- ❑ If you're not doing it, then they certainly won't



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Behaviors of Meaningful Participation

- ☐ Respect the role of the public
- ☐ Express interest in stakeholders and their values
- ☐ Have patience
- ☐ Be humble
- ☐ Be transparent
- ☐ Communicate clearly
- ☐ Demonstrate personal integrity
- ☐ Be open and friendly
- ☐ Listen fully
- ☐ Demonstrate energy and a sense of humor



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Be a Learning Organization

Make evaluation an explicit part of all projects:

1. Evaluate project success against objectives
2. Support continuous improvement
3. Learn for future projects



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DIALOGUE

COMMITMENT

- ☐ Which of these practices do you think are most important to EPA's work and why?
- ☐ Where do we have work to do?



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EXERCISE

COMMITMENT

(work in small groups)

- ☐ Pick one principle from section 1 (creating commitment, core capacity, behaviors, or learning)
- ☐ Think about what we could do to improve our performance in this area
- ☐ Make a list of simple actions that we could take ourselves or with our team



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The Elements of Meaningful Participation

2. Establish Clear Expectations



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Identify Needs, Constraints, and Commitments

NEEDS

- ☐ What would a "successful" decision look like?
- ☐ What aspects of the decision can the public actually influence?
- ☐ At what points in the process can the public be most helpful or influential?
- ☐ Where are we most interested in community input?
- ☐ Where can community input be most valuable?
- ☐ What are the right questions to ask for input?



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Identify Needs, Constraints, and Commitments

CONSTRAINTS

- ❑ What aspects of the decision are already determined?
- ❑ What legal and regulatory constraints exist?
- ❑ How far along is decision-making and can we step back?
- ❑ Are there decision constraints that limit the ability to engage the public?
- ❑ Where are we less likely to listen to input?
- ❑ What are known resource constraints?



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Identify Needs, Constraints, and Commitments

COMMITMENTS

- ❑ Is there commitment at all levels to fair and open engagement?
- ❑ How much are we willing to change from what is assumed or proposed?
- ❑ Are there conflicting or competing priorities or goals we must consider?
- ❑ Are there unspoken interests or hidden agendas?
- ❑ Will we commit the necessary time and resources?



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Identify Needs, Constraints, and Commitments

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

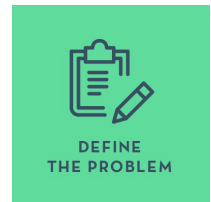
- ❑ What do we know about community concerns and priorities, what assumptions do we need to challenge?
- ❑ What are the main community concerns and values with regard to this project?
- ❑ How much do stakeholders want to be involved?
- ❑ What is the potential for outrage?



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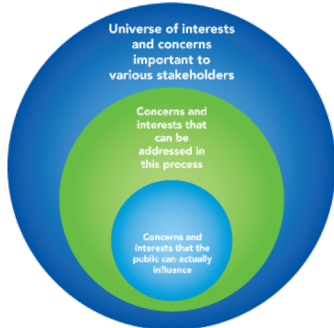
Clearly Define the Problem

- ❑ What needs to be fixed?
- ❑ Why this is important?
- ❑ Who is affected?
- ❑ Define success
- ❑ Identify known constraints
- ❑ Identify values to respect



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Clarify What's On and Off the Table



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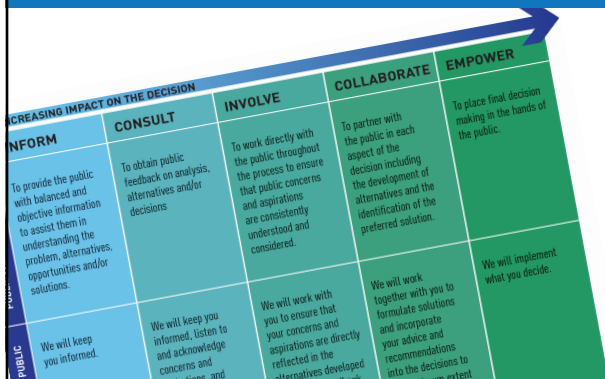
Not All Public Participation Is The Same

- ❑ The more *opportunity for the public to influence the decision*, the higher level of public participation you are doing
- ❑ You need to make sure to *set expectations that are consistent with the public's opportunity* to influence the outcome



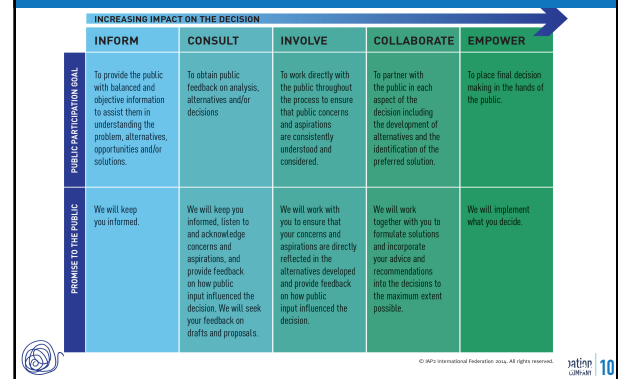
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Identify The Appropriate Level of Engagement



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The IAP2 Spectrum



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Select An Appropriate Level Of Participation

- Try to accommodate the level of engagement that key stakeholders are seeking
- Don't select a level higher than the public will support
- Never choose a level higher than EPA's commitment
- Make sure needed resources and time are available



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There is specific public input we seek and intend to take into account as we make our decisions (we are not simply seeking public buy-in)?

[NO]

INFORM

[YES]

We are seeking to engage stakeholders early and throughout the process rather than just get public comment at one or two points?

[NO]

CONSULT

[YES]

We intend to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to work on the problem and potentially seek consensus?

[NO]

INVOLVE

[YES]

We intend to give decision-making authority to the public on all or part of the decision?

[NO]

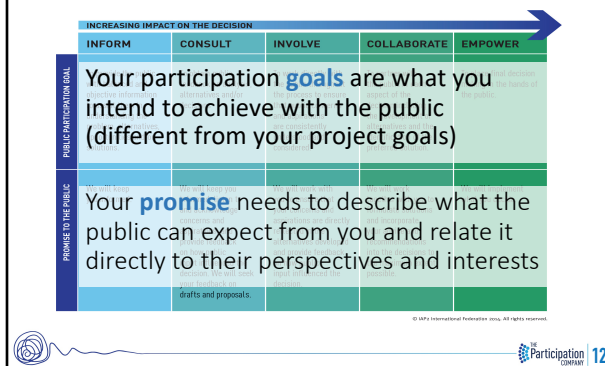
COLLABORATE

[YES]

EMPOWER

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Create Clear Goals and a Promise



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The Promise To The Public

- Promise only what you can deliver (and be specific)
- Deliver what you promise
- Demonstrate what you deliver



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DIALOGUE

EXPECTATIONS

(full group)

- ❑ How well do we set clear goals and expectations for public involvement in our projects?
- ❑ What do you think is needed to help us do this better?



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EXERCISE

EXPECTATIONS

(work in small groups)

- ❑ Identify an active project and provide an overview
- ❑ Use the spectrum to ID what level of participation is appropriate
- ❑ Create a promise to the public that will clearly describe what they can expect



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The Elements of Meaningful Participation



3. Process to Focus on the Right Things at the Right Time



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P2 is a Process that Needs to Be Planned



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Good Process Takes Time to

- ❑ Build trust
- ❑ Build credibility
- ❑ Create shared purpose
- ❑ Create shared knowledge
- ❑ Create common ground



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P2 is a process...

- ❑ Integrate participation directly into the decision process
- ❑ Put the public on the same learning curve as the project itself
- ❑ Integrate meetings and events where they make the most sense
- ❑ Provide the public the same types of information that you would provide to decision-makers.



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P2 is not an event . . .

- ❑ Don't rely on a single activity
- ❑ Don't do "parachute" participation
- ❑ Don't use polls

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Define The Decision Process

- ❑ Clearly define the decision process
- ❑ Identify how and why decisions are made
- ❑ Identify how and where public input is considered
- ❑ The public needs to be on the same learning curve as everyone else

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Integrate Public Participation Into Decision-making



- ❑ Each step is an opportunity to gain or lose trust
- ❑ Public input should be considered like any other data
- ❑ Identify how public input will be incorporated into decision discussions and evaluation

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Identify Where Public Input Matters Most



- ❑ The public's voice is best heard in the early steps of decision-making

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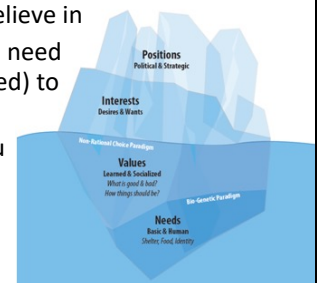
Ask Questions That Will Result in Meaningful Input



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Focus on Stakeholder Values

- ❑ **Values:** what you believe in
- ❑ **Interests:** What you need (or perceive you need) to protect your values
- ❑ **Positions:** What you want to meet your interests



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“

It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.

—Roy Disney


”

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We Have to Start at Values

- ❑ You cannot start at positions
- ❑ We start at values and build solutions from there, hopefully together
- ❑ If you do not understand community values, you will not be able to communicate with the community



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Values vs. Positions

Position:
I want speed bumps on my street

Interest:
I want to stop speeding cars

Values:
My child's safety

Agreement Easily Reached:
You want action taken to protect your children from speeding cars

Early Positioning Avoided:
What action, by whom, how

Common Values Lead to Decision Criteria

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Create a Learning Journey

Define Problem → Define Criteria → Gather Data → Create Options → Evaluate Options → Decide

- ❑ Communication
- ❑ Input
- ❑ Agreement Seeking

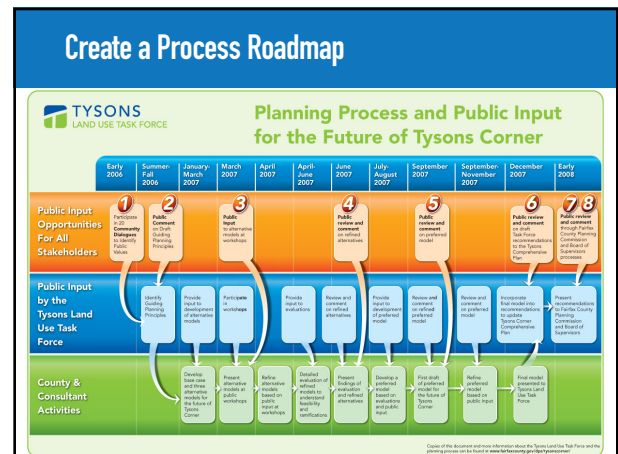
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Decision Step	Communication Objectives	Input Objectives	Agreement Objectives
Define Problem	Ensure all key stakeholders understand the problem.	Identify community values and interests to include in the problem statement.	Develop a shared definition of the problem with the community.
Define Criteria	Create clear criteria that reflect community values and interests.	Identify community values and interests to include in criteria.	Develop and agree on key criteria with the community.
Gather Data	Make data fully accessible to community.	Ask stakeholders about their concerns and ideas regarding the project.	Seek broad agreement on the data to be collected.
Create Options	Clearly describe options and how they address community interests and values.	Get input on key aspects of options that are important to the community.	Work collectively to craft options with the community.
Evaluate Options	Explain the evaluation process and details of how each option meets criteria.	Get input on how the community believes options meet their values and interests.	Ask key stakeholders to participate in the evaluation process.
Decide	Clearly explain the decision rationale and how public input was used.	Get public input on preferences.	Seek a community consensus on the decision.

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Actively Facilitate the Entire Process

- Stakeholder participation does not facilitate itself



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DIALOGUE PROCESS (full group)

- Are we engaging in the right parts of our projects?
- Are we asking the right questions?
- Where could we improve?



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EXERCISE

PROCESS

(small groups)

- Using the same case, identify one or two points in the process where public input would be most helpful?
- Craft some questions that you would ask to help generate that input?



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Icebreaker



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4. Engage the Whole Community



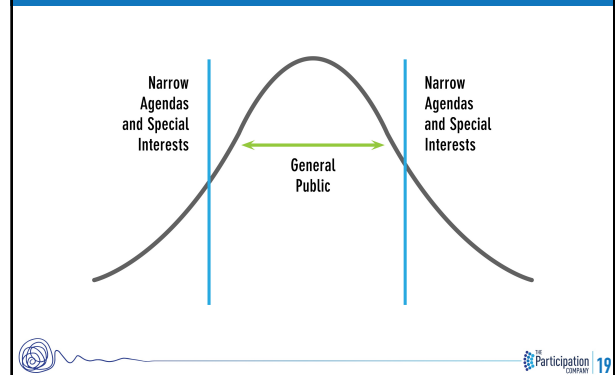
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Your Project Should Look Like The Whole Community



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"The Public" Does Not Exist



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Identify Who Should Be Engaged

1. Don't just wait to see who shows up!
2. Attendees at public meetings rarely represent all interests in the community
3. Think about the range of voices or perspectives that "should" be heard
4. Think about who will be impacted as well as who could influence the outcome
5. Don't simply accept the statement of stakeholders who say they speak for others--verify

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Create A Stakeholder Map

- ☐ Geographic
- ☐ Demographic
- ☐ Impact
- ☐ Power

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Ensure Equitable Access

- ☐ How well do currently engaged stakeholders represent the community?
- ☐ What community groups exist?
- ☐ Who has the trust of their communities?
- ☐ Identify gaps and create strategies to reach out?

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ID Who Needs Assistance

Inherent Access to Participation	
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected officials Official commissions and Advisory boards Affluent communities Some business groups Some activist groups
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community organizations and foundations Some faith-based organizations Some social organizations Some individual activists Most Civic and Condo Associations
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically disenfranchised populations Less affluent communities Non English-speaking communities Youth

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EXERCISE

COMMUNITY

(small groups)

- What stakeholders are often missing from our projects?
- Identify some strategies and activities could help to provide them access to our projects.



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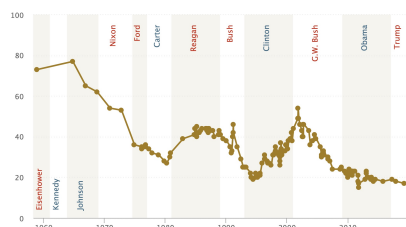
5. Build Trust by Meeting People Where They Are



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Recognize Where We All Are

1. Historically low trust in government
2. Historically high levels of public anger



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29% of Americans
view Government officials
as *credible*



76

15% of Americans
believe that
*Government is
working for them*



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Anger is a public epidemic in America; it contaminates everything from media controversy to road rage to wars to mass shootings.



-- Jean Kim, Psychiatrist, GW University



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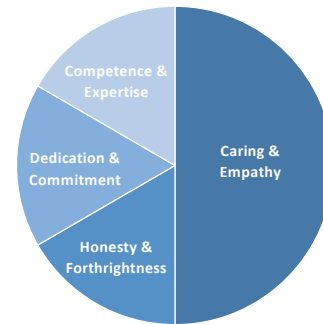
Getting Past Anger Requires Building Trust

- ❑ **Empathy**—Walk in their shoes.
- ❑ **Compassion**—Show that you care about them and their concerns.
- ❑ **Honesty**—Answer questions that are asked and be honest about what you know and don't know.
- ❑ **Commitment**—Be proactive and keep your word.
- ❑ **Competence**—Prove that you know what you are doing.



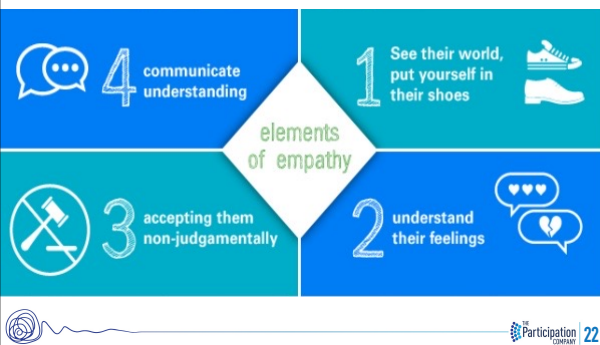
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Factors That Inspire Trust And Credibility

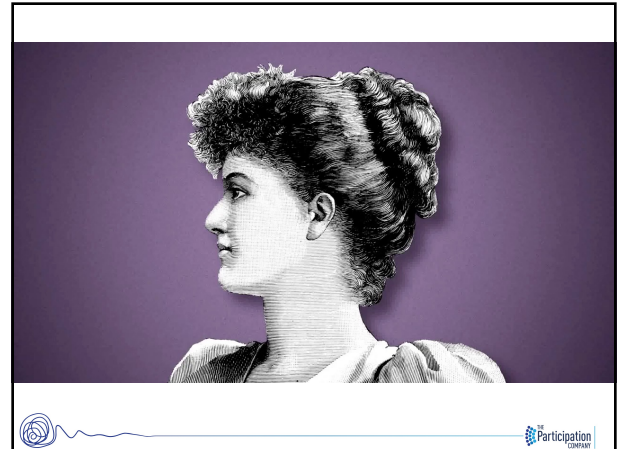


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Four Elements of Empathy



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Understand What Makes People Angry

Threats to:

Certainty
Affluence
Rights
Equity
Safety



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Start Where Your Stakeholders Are

- ❑ Relationships are at the heart of all public participation
- ❑ We need to know **where we are** with our stakeholders so we know **where to start**



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Where Are Your Stakeholders?

- ❑ Geographically
- ❑ Emotionally
- ❑ Historically
- ❑ Level of Knowledge



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Know Your Stakeholders

- ❑ How well they understand this issue and government's roles and responsibilities
- ❑ How they perceive the potential impacts and what is most important to them about this issue
- ❑ Their history with government
- ❑ How they want to participate
- ❑ Where they get information



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Know the Balance in Your Goodwill Account

Credible Organizations are:

- ❑ Truthful
- ❑ Transparent
- ❑ Responsible
- ❑ Caring
- ❑ Consistent



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Assess and Repair Relationships

- ❑ What is our level of trust and credibility with different groups?
- ❑ Where can we address improvements directly?
- ❑ Where might we need help from third parties?



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Build Long-Term Community Capacity

- ❑ Create Sustainable Community Programs and Information vehicles
- ❑ Identify Long-term Community Partners
- ❑ Help Teach People how to Participate Meaningfully



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BUILD TRUST

- ❑ How is our goodwill account?
- ❑ What are examples of deposits and withdrawals?

DIALOGUE



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EXERCISE

BUILD TRUST

(small groups)

- ❑ You are in charge of sustaining EPA's trust with the community in a large long-term Superfund cleanup.
- ❑ Outline key activities in a realistic and sustainable strategy to achieve that.



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The Elements of Meaningful Participation



6. Communicate, Relate, and Connect



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Essential Truths of Communication

1. **It's not about you.** It's not what you say, it's what people hear that matters.
2. **It's about them.** People listen in the context of their lived experience.
3. **Emotion defines communication.** Strong emotion (insecurity, defensiveness, self-doubt, conflict, and fear) lead to poor listening and miscommunication.



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Essential Truths of Communication

4. **Listen first.** The better you listen, the better you will communicate, and the more you will be understood.
5. **People don't resist change.** They resist **being forced to change** and are more receptive to change when they participate in the change process.
6. **Your work does not speak for itself.** The credibility of the message depends on the messenger, the timing, and the circumstances.



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Transparent Communication

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| ① Truthful | ⑥ Relevant |
| ② Fundamental | ⑦ Accessible |
| ③ Comprehensive | ⑧ Timely |
| ④ Consistent | ⑨ Shows Care |
| ⑤ Clear | ⑩ Allows feedback |



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NEVER...

- ❑ Tell the public what you think they want to hear
- ❑ Communicate solely to mollify angry voices
- ❑ Assume the public can't deal with complexity or nuance
- ❑ Dumb it down



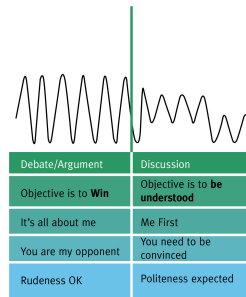
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Dialogue



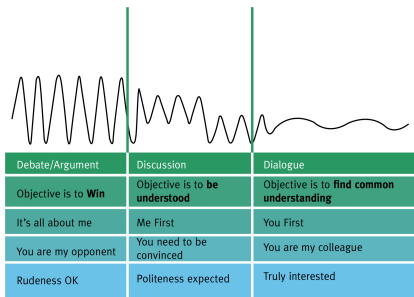
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Dialogue



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Dialogue



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Dialogue Space

1. Create a safe, respectful space
2. Make openness, trust, and respect the rule
3. Encourage new perspectives
4. Invite curious listening
5. Allow for open and collaborative conversations

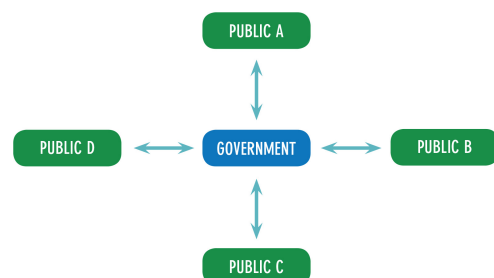
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Invest in Long-Term Relationships

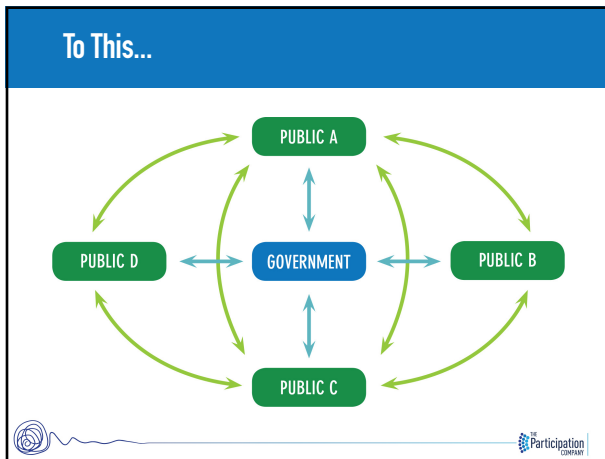
- ❑ Get out of project silos, build ongoing relationships and knowledge
- ❑ Invite the public into process design and implementation
- ❑ Work to create shared ownership of process and results
- ❑ Help them understand how government works, especially its function, rules, and constraints

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Move From This...



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DIALOGUE COMMUNICATION and RELATIONSHIPS

- What strikes you as most important about these concepts?
- Where can you see making adjustments to EPA's normal approaches to our stakeholders?

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111



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Two Essential Questions for Picking Your Techniques

- Who are we trying to reach?
- What are we trying to achieve?



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We Need to Connect on a Human Scale

- ❑ How do we ensure that stakeholders will have the information they need?
- ❑ How do we ensure we will hear from the full range of stakeholders?
- ❑ How do we ensure that the tools and approaches are accessible to the communities we seek to engage?
- ❑ How will the tools help us obtain meaningful input on appropriate topics and issues?
- ❑ How do we use both in-person and on-line tools appropriately?



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Think Twice About that Public Meeting

- ❑ "One-off" events are a poor use of resources
- ❑ Meetings alone are not good participation
- ❑ One meeting can never meet all our needs
- ❑ Meetings are still important, just make sure we get real value from the effort
- ❑ Think smaller to engage more people



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Think Smaller

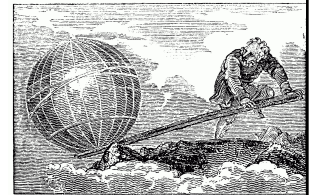
- ❑ Look for ways to reach people in more informal settings
- ❑ Piggy-back on what is already happening in the community



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Leverage Activities to Reach More People

- ❑ Recreate the meeting experience on line
- ❑ Create self facilitated events
- ❑ Live-stream and record sessions
- ❑ Dramatically increase the use of video



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Ten Ways to Shift Your Focus

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| 1. Positions | ➡ | Values |
| 2. Usual Suspects | ➡ | All Voices |
| 3. Argument | ➡ | Dialogue |
| 4. Buy-In | ➡ | Real Input |
| 5. Events | ➡ | Processes |



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Ten Ways to Shift Your Focus

- | | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|
| 6. Late Start | ➡ | Early, continuous |
| 7. Opinions | ➡ | Conclusions |
| 8. Demands | ➡ | Shared response |
| 9. One Size | ➡ | Custom process |
| 10. Arms-length | ➡ | Relationships |



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DIALOGUE

WRAPUP

- ❑ What are the key takeaways for you from everything we have discussed?
- ❑ What are some simple ideas for how we might be able to implement some of these in our work?

